



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

II. — *The Danaid-Myth.*

BY DR. CAMPBELL BONNER,

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE.

OUR fullest account of Danaus and his daughters is to be found in the *Bibliotheca* ascribed to Apollodorus (II. 1). The essential features of the story are about as follows :—

Danaus and Aegyptus were two brothers of royal lineage ; the one settled in Libya, the other in Arabia or Egypt. Aegyptus had by different wives fifty sons, and Danaus had fifty daughters. The two brothers fell into strife about the succession to their father's kingdom, and Danaus, fearing for the safety of his daughters and himself, fled with them to Argos. The sons of Aegyptus pursued, and by force or persuasion prevailed upon Danaus to give them his daughters in marriage. But after the wedding feast, Danaus bade his daughters slay their husbands during the night. Thus all the young men perished except Lynceus, whom his bride, Hypermetra, allowed to escape. For this disobedience, she was imprisoned by her father. Meanwhile, her sisters had sunk the heads of their murdered husbands in the Lernaean marsh, and had been cleansed of their guilt by Hermes and Athena. Afterward Danaus released Hypermetra and gave his sanction to her marriage with Lynceus. His other daughters were married to the victors in an athletic contest.

In the scholia to Euripides (*Hec.* 886) there is an account that differs in some noteworthy particulars from the narrative of Apollodorus. From that it appears that Danaus and Aegyptus lived in Argos, and that the former, moved by envy and fear, drove his brother into Egypt with his sons. The sons of Aegyptus afterward returned, and met their death in the fatal wedding-night. Nothing is said about the purification of the guilty sisters, nor about their second marriage ; on the contrary, the scholiast relates that Lynceus

revenged the murder of his brothers by slaying Danaus and all his daughters except Hypermestra.

There are several allusions to the crime of the Danaids in writers of the classical period,<sup>1</sup> but no mention of their punishment in the lower world is found until the pseudo-Platonic dialogue *Axiochus* (p. 371 E). Hence there is some ground for believing this punishment to be a later addition to the story.

Writers on mythology have almost with one accord sought to find an explanation of the Danaid myth in natural phenomena. The interpretation of Preller (Preller-Plew, *Griech. Myth.* II. pp. 46-47), which is repeated in Roscher's *Lexikon*, may be taken as a type of these attempts. According to Preller, the Danaids are the nymphs of the Argive springs, their impetuous suitors are the streams of the land, which in wet seasons are violent torrents, but in summer dry up, as the nymphs cut off their heads; that is, check the waters at the fountains. Preller finds a confirmation of his view in the tradition that the heads of the sons of Aegyptus were buried in the Lernaean marsh. For, he says, springs are the heads of rivers, and the moist region of Lerna was especially rich in springs.

The interpretation of myths by natural phenomena is much less in favor now than formerly, and one may well be dissatisfied with Preller's fanciful explanation. Let us examine some of the arguments that may be urged in favor of his view. First, about the heads of the murdered youths. The tradition is not consistent, for Pausanias (II. 24, 2) says that their heads were buried beside a road leading into the Argive citadel, and their bodies thrown into the Lernaean marsh. This, of course, may be only a confusion; but even supposing the other version to be the correct one, the argument is worth very little, for it is doubtful whether the use of *head* for *source*, *spring*, was as familiar to the Greeks as it is to us. I know of only one certain instance of *κεφαλή* with the meaning *source* or *headwater*, in Herodotus (IV. 91). But since

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Aesch. *Prom.* 879 ff.; Eur. *Hec.* 886; *H. F.* 1016; Pindar, *Nem.* X. 1 ff.

in that passage Herodotus is reproducing an inscription of Darius, one commentator, Abicht, has gone so far as to suggest that the peculiar use of *κεφαλή* may be due to its representing an Old Persian word (Sir) which means both *head* and *source*. No example of *κεφαλή* with the meaning of *spring* is quoted in Sophocles's *Lexikon of Byzantine Greek*, and it is not until the modern period that we find the diminutive *κεφαλάριον* with the meaning *spring*. But leaving all this out of the question, the story about the heads of the sons of Aegyptus can be better explained in another way. I shall, therefore, return to this matter later.

Another circumstance that has done much to uphold the old interpretation of the myth is, that Amydone was numbered among the daughters of Danaus. Her adventure with a satyr and her amour with Poseidon are related by Apollodorus, *l.c.*, and Hyginus (*Fab.* 169). Now Amydone as the favorite of Poseidon, and the maiden from whom the river Amydone, near Lerna, took its name, is rightly to be considered a nymph.<sup>1</sup> But the story of Amydone does not really belong to the Danaid-myth. Some of the ancient writers themselves set her apart from the blood-stained sisters. Pindar (*Pyth.* IX. 193) gives the number of the women that were won in the athletic contest as forty-eight, and the scholiast *ad locum* says that Hypermetra and Amydone were excepted, — the former because she was married to Lynceus, the latter because she had found a lover in Poseidon. Lucian (*Dial. Mar.* 6, *ad fin.*) makes Poseidon say to Amydone that she alone shall escape the endless punishment to which the Danaids were doomed. Thus it seems not unlikely that in the earliest form of the story Amydone had nothing whatever to do with the women that murdered their husbands, and that the statement that she was one of the daughters of Danaus is an invention of genealogical writers. Similarly Agraulos, Pandrosos, and Herse, originally nymphs, were by Attic genealogists said to be daughters of Cecrops. (See Bloch in Roscher's *Lexikon*, article "Nymphen," col. 529.)

<sup>1</sup> In regard to the river and fountain Amydone, see Paus. II. 37, 1; Strab. VIII., p. 371.

Other bits of evidence cited in favor of the current interpretation are that the art of digging wells was, according to the legend, first taught by Danaus or his daughters, and the number of the Danaïds corresponds to that of the Nereids. But Danaus, as the eponymous hero of the Danaän race, is the reputed inventor of other arts as well: even that of writing is ascribed to him by some authorities. And as for the number fifty, what of the fifty sons of Priam and the fifty daughters of Thestius?

Whatever may be said of Amymone and certain other nymphs that were included in the family of Danaus, there is no reason to regard the women that murdered their husbands as nymphs, or to put an allegorical interpretation upon their crime. If this narrative is carefully examined, I think it will be found to be no nature-myth, but a mere monster-story like many that are told in the nursery to-day.

It is necessary, however, to set aside an element that does not belong to the original story. This is the fiction that the murder of the sons of Aegyptus was a justifiable action, committed by the Danaïds in defence of their honor and freedom. Thus in the *Suppliants* of Aeschylus the Danaïds are represented as having fled from Egypt to Argos in order not to be forced into a marriage with their violent cousins. But Eduard Meyer (*Forschungen zur alten Geschichte*, pp. 78, 82) has shown that the story of Danaus and his daughters belonged to Greece, and that its connection with Egypt was a consequence of the identification of the Argive Io with the Egyptian Isis; for Danaus was said to be descended from Io.<sup>1</sup> (See Apollodorus, *l.c.*) When the story arose that Io wandered to Egypt and there gave birth to Epaphus, the historians and genealogists had to explain how the later descendants of Io came back to Argos. They resorted to the familiar device of a quarrel between Danaus and his brother, and hence arose the account of the flight of Danaus to Argos, and the conception of the Danaïds as persecuted maidens. There are indications that this conception never

<sup>1</sup> Wecklein, in *Sitzungsber. d. bair. Akad.* 1893, pp. 401 ff., proposes a less satisfactory explanation of the transference of Danaus from Argos to Egypt.

took root in the popular belief. If it had done so, the deed of the Danaids would hardly have become proverbial for impious cruelty, nor would the story of their punishment in Hades have gained currency. Besides, when we remember that some of the poets attribute to the Danaids a certain Amazon-like harshness and ferocity, it is easier to believe that in the popular legends, at any rate, they are always bloodthirsty monsters. (Cf. Melanippides, *ap. Ath.* XIV., p. 651, and the fragment of the *Danaïs* quoted by Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* IV. 19, 122.)

The original form of the story about the crime of the Danaids may have been something like this. Fifty brothers, known to the later story as the sons of Aegyptus, are entertained by fifty maidens and their father, whom the later account identified with the eponymous hero of the Danaäns. During the night, at their father's instigation, the women kill the youths by cutting off their heads; only one escapes. The marriage, as is often the case in rude popular stories, is a mere euphemism.

Now compare with this ancient legend a folk-story current among many modern peoples. A band of brothers lose their way in a forest, and take refuge in the hut or cavern of an ogre or witch. The youths pass the night with the daughters of their host. The youngest and shrewdest of the brothers suspects that treachery is intended, and by a trick, such as an exchange of head-dress or a shifting of positions, causes the ogre to cut off the heads of his own daughters. Thus the youths escape.

I have seen no fewer than twelve versions of this latter story. It seems to be known to all European peoples, from the Avars of the Caucasus and the modern Greeks to the Basques of the Pyrenees and the Icelanders. In the nurseries of England and America it is the story of Hop o' my Thumb. There are of course many insignificant variations, and in most versions, as in "Hop o' my Thumb," the story has been suited to juvenile hearers by representing the persons concerned as little children. In most cases also the story has been filled out by the addition of new adventures:

The chief difference between these modern stories and what I believe to have been the older form of the Danaid myth consists in the introduction of the trick by means of which all the brothers make their escape. This is a new motive. Then in most of the modern stories the escape is entirely owing to the cleverness of the youngest brother; but in one (the Icelandic version) he is warned and assisted by a personage corresponding to Hypermestra in the Danaid-myth.

The resemblance of these modern stories to the Danaid-myth had been noted by one writer on folk-lore, Ludwig Laistner, in his *Das Rätsel der Sphinx*, a work from which I have drawn a large part of my information about these stories. Laistner, however, notices the resemblance only in passing, and adopts for the Danaid-myth a less satisfactory explanation which cannot be discussed here.

It seems probable, then, that the earlier form of the Danaid-myth was not widely different from folk-stories of modern races. That the Greeks had such stories of demoniac women is proved by the accounts of the Thracian King Diomedes, who used to compel strangers to satisfy the desires of his monstrous daughters and then put them to death. (See Schol. Ar. *Eccles.* 1029, and Hesychius, s.v. *Διομήδειος ἀνάγκη*.) A similar conception may underlie the story of Heracles's adventure with the fifty daughters of Thestius, told by Pausanias (IX. 27, 6).

Even if it be admitted that the Danaid-myth was originally a coarse story of this sort, the question of an explanation arises again. But it seems useless further to analyze such rough, simple folk-tales. Their origin concerns the psychologist more than the philologist. The close resemblance of the different versions to one another suggests a common origin. There are no traces of a literary tradition, and the wide diffusion of the stories militates against the assumption of a transmission from one people to another within historical times. (Exceptions may of course be made in the case of closely related and neighboring communities.) So, we may regard this ancient legend as a folk-story common to the

primitive Indo-European tribes, or, perhaps better, adopt Professor Gardner's phrase and say that such resemblances as exist between the Danaid-myth on the one hand and the modern stories on the other, or the resemblances among the widely separated modern stories, are due to "parallel workings of the mythopoeic instinct" rather than to a common origin.

The story that the heads of the sons of Aegyptus were thrown into the Lernaean marsh is best regarded as an aetiological myth growing out of some religious ceremony practised in that neighborhood. This view is expressed by Gruppe (*Griech. Mythologie*, p. 180), who seems to refer to the statement of some of the paroemiographers, that it was customary to throw expiatory offerings into the lake or marsh of Lerna. (Zenobius, IV. 86; Apostolius, X. 57; cf. Strab. VIII., p. 371, and Suidas, s.v. *Λέρνη θεατῶν*.)

It had occurred to me that the myth might have grown out of a peculiar rite briefly described by Plutarch (*Isis and Osiris*, 35). He says that "the Argives call the ox-born Dionysus out of the water with trumpets, throwing *εἰς τὴν ἄβυσσον* a lamb as an offering to the Gate-keeper" (Hades). The *ἄβυσσος* referred to is certainly the bottomless Alcyonian lake of the Lernaean district, described by Pausanias (II. 37, 5-6. Cf. Schol. Pind. *Ol.* VII. 60.). Now this religious observance seems to have given rise to the story told in the Scholia to the *Iliad* (XIV. 319, Maass, II., p. 87) that Dionysus was slain by Perseus and his body thrown into the Lernaean lake. The story that the Danaids threw the heads of the murdered youths into the lake may also have arisen aetiologically from the same obscure ceremony. The rite described by Plutarch may of course be one of the very expiatory ceremonies that the paroemiographers mention.

The story that forty-eight of the daughters of Danaus were given in marriage to noble youths who were matched against one another in a foot-race was known even in Pindar's time (*Pyth.* IX. 193 ff.), and is related again by Pausanias (III. 12, 2). But there is some reason to believe that this feature of the myth is purely an invention of flattering genealogists. The



idea of the guilty sisters escaping punishment and living in peace and happiness for the rest of their days is hardly consistent with the popular conception of the Danaids as types of ferocity; and we have seen that according to one version of the story all the daughters of Danaus except Hypermestra were slain by Lynceus. I emphasize this point especially because Laistner asserts that the essential feature of the whole story is the race of the suitors, with which he combines the eternal water-pouring of the Danaids, and bases upon this combination a theory about the original form of the myth. But these two things evidently belong to different traditions which cannot be reconciled. Except the compiler Hyginus, not one of our authorities shows acquaintance with both the story of the race and that of the punishment of the Danaids in the lower world. It seems probable, therefore, that the account of the purification of the Danaids and their second marriage is an invention of Argive chroniclers, who wished to trace the noble families of Argos back to Danaus, yet strove to keep them clear of the infamy with which popular legend had branded his daughters. It was natural that Pindar should adopt this more refined version of the story, and Pausanias may have derived his information from Argive sources.

The story that the Danaids were condemned to fill a leaky vessel in Hades has been much discussed, and its antiquity has been questioned. We have seen that the first allusion to it occurs in the *Axiochus*. But in the *Gorgias* of Plato (p. 493 A-C) a similar punishment is attributed to those who die without knowledge of the mysteries. Hence some writers contend that the peculiar punishment was transferred from the uninitiated to the Danaids. Still, the absence of earlier literary evidence for the punishment of the Danaids may be fortuitous. Nor can the question of the respective ages of the two stories be decided from archaeological evidence. According to Pausanias (X. 31, 9-11) the celebrated painting of Polygnotus at Delphi contained figures of the uninitiated carrying water in leaky jars to fill a larger vessel. The punishment of the Danaids is represented on a black-figured vase in the Munich collection (153, Jahn), while the punish-

ment of the uninitiated is depicted on a black-figured Attic lecythus (reproduced in *Arch. Zeit.* 1871, pl. 31, 22).

The opinion expressed by Rohde (*Psyche*,<sup>2</sup> I., p. 326 ff.) in regard to the punishment of the Danaids and the uninitiated has been accepted by many scholars, and deserves special mention. He believes that there was an ancient popular superstition that people who died unmarried were doomed in the lower world to fill a leaky vessel. He sees a confirmation of this theory in the custom of placing the vessel called *λειτουργός* upon the graves of unmarried persons,—an indication that they had to perform through all eternity the ceremony of preparing the bridal bath, which they had neglected in life. Since marriage was regarded as a sacred rite, the punishment of those who had neglected it was readily transferred to the uninitiated. Later still, under poetic influence, the endless task was fastened upon the Danaids, who had scorned and outraged the marriage relation by murdering their husbands. Thus the old superstition about the fate of the *ἄγαμοι* was entirely forgotten.

In spite of the favor with which Rohde's view has met, objections can be raised against it. As Milchhöfer remarks (*Philol.* LIII, p. 397, n. 14), the vessels that the Danaids carry in works of art are not *λειτουργοί*, nor does the great jar that they are to fill bear any resemblance to a bath-tub. Besides, there is no proof that the Greeks had any such belief about the fate of unmarried people as Rohde assumes. A recent writer (Waser) in the *Archiv für Religions-wissenschaft* (1899, p. 47 ff.) tries to strengthen Rohde's case by citing instances of German superstitions in which various fruitless labors are imposed upon the spirits of persons that die unmarried, but his examples are hardly to the point.

It is hard to believe that the punishment of the Danaids, which in the post-classical period of Greek literature was a hackneyed proverb, did not belong to the earlier form of the myth also. One is tempted to guess at reasons why this particular punishment was assigned to the Danaids. But it is perhaps safer to say that there is nothing in the eternal water-pouring itself that is exclusively appropriate to the

persons punished, any more than there is in the endless labor of Sisyphus. The task of filling a leaky vessel is widely known and variously applied in folk-lore, from Grimm's *Märchen* to *Uncle Remus*. Such a task would be assigned to the Danaids in Hades when people began to feel that their bloody deed demanded punishment in the lower world. The fact that the same endless task is also assigned to the uninitiated, or to the wicked in general (see Plato, *Rep.* II., p. 363 E), is another indication that the fastening of it upon the Danaids exclusively, in later times, is only a matter of convention.